DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 458 321 UD 034 531

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TITLE	Affirmative Development of Academic Abilities.
INSTITUTION	Columbia Univ., New York, NY. Inst. for Urban and Minority Education.
SPONS AGENCY	College Board, New York, NY.
PUB DATE	2001-09-00
NOTE	6p.; Published quarterly. Theme issue.
AVAILABLE FROM	Institute for Urban and Minority Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, Box 75, 525 West 120th Street, New York, NY 10027. Tel: 212-678-3780.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT	Pedagogical Inquiry and Praxis; n2 Sep 2001
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Achievement; Access to Education; Affirmative Action; Elementary Secondary Education; *Equal Education; Intellectual Development; *Minority Group Children; Racial Bias; Racial Discrimination; Socioeconomic Status
IDENTIFIERS	Wealth

ABSTRACT

This article describes affirmative development, a concept designed to complement colloquial notions of affirmative action, which emphasizes the creation and enhancement of competence in addition to the more traditional emphasis on the equitable reward of competence. In 1903 and 1958, W.E.B. DuBois examined whether 20th century problems related to color or socioeconomic status. More recent writings have validated his prediction that inequalities in distribution of income and wealth would emerge as more critical than color. Although color and other sources of cultural identity continue to be the basis for social divisions, it appears to be the unequal distribution of resources and perceived threat of loss of those resources that enable cultural, gender, racial, and religious bias to flourish. After defining wealth and capital, the paper discusses affirmative action and proposes adjustments that target larger and more diverse groups (those that are low on wealth and wealth-derived capital resources). It describes an affirmative development policy within education that would emphasize deliberate or affirmative development of academic ability in a broad range of students who have historically been deprived of resources and who are under-represented among academically high achieving students. It also emphasizes the need to develop students' intellectual competence. (SM)

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ED 458 321

AFFIRMATIVE DEVELOPMENT OF ACADEMIC ABILITIES

PEDAGOGICAL INQUIRY AND PRAXIS
Number 2, September 2001

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Program of Research on Affirmative Development of Academic Ability
Institute for Urban and Minority Education
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Pedagogical Inquiry and Praxis

INFORMING THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIGH ACADEMIC ABILITY IN MINORITY STUDENTS

THE PROGRAM OF RESEARCH ON AFFIRMATIVE DEVELOPMENT OF ACADEMIC ABILITY, TEACHERS COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY AND THE COLLEGE BOARD

Number 2, September, 2001

Affirmative Development of Academic Abilities

Introduction

The construct, affirmative development, appears to have originated in a presentation by Edmund Gordon at a conference, sponsored by the National Action Committee on Minorities in Engineering, in an exchange between Gordon and Scott Miller concerning the persistent underrepresentation and modest performance of minority students in mathematics and the sciences. This may have been seven years or more before Corta-Robles, Gordon, and Miller teamed up with the College Board to create the National Task Force on Minority High Achievement. The construct first appeared in print in the report of the Task Force, Reaching the Top (The College Board, 1999), as the implicit over arching recommendation of the Task Force:

> The continued educational underdevelopment of so many segments of the African American, Latino, and Native American communities makes a very strong case for expanding their access to good schools and to high quality colleges and universities, the latter of which has been a primary focus of affirmative action. But expanded access does not necessarily translate directly into higher academic achievement. Thus, the Task Force recommends that an extensive array of public and private policies, actions, and investments be pursued, which would collectively provide many more opportunities for academic development for underrepresented minority students through the schools, colleges, and universities that they attend, through their homes, and through their communities. We summarize this as a commitment to *affirmative development*.

In this paper I continue that discussion.

Inequality of Capital

In the summer of 1958, in a talk at a public hall on 125th Street and Lenox Avenue in Harlem, W.E.B. DuBois mused about his 1903 claim that the "problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line." In 1958, he was beginning to consider the possibility that the line between the haves and the have nots, greatly confounded by color, could emerge as a more critical problem. I think DuBois was correct in 1903 and in 1958. The century between 1900 and 2000 was marked by considerable turmoil associated with racist values and DuBois' "color line," but, equally significant, it was also marked by a monumental decline in the significance of the "color line." Wilson's book, *Declining Significance of Race* (1978), documented this radical change in our society and validated the DuBoisian prediction that inequalities in the distribution of income and wealth would emerge as more critical.

Skin color and other sources of cultural identity continue to be the basis for troublesome social divisions in the United States and elsewhere. However, I am increasingly persuaded that it is

Editor's Note

Affirmative development is a concept first advanced by Professor Edmund W. Gordon more than 10 years ago as a complement to colloquial notions of affirmative action. Affirmative development places emphasis on the creation and enhancement of competence in addition to the more traditional emphasis on the equitable reward of competence.

The Affirmative Development of Academic Ability Program is based on the assumption that academic abilities are not simply inherited aptitudes but are abilities that are developed through pedagogical and social interventions. Through this program of research we seek to determine what those interventions are and how we can deliberately create them for persons whose homes, communities, and schools do not naturally provide them. (The concept is elaborated in Gordon and Bridglall's *Affirmative Development of Academic Ability*, scheduled for publication by Rowman & Littlefield in Fall 2002.)

This concept is particularly relevant to and can inform, both theoretically and prescriptively, efforts to reduce the academic achievement gap between majority students and some ethnic minority students. The College Board and Teachers College, Columbia University, have instituted the Program of Research on the Affirmative Development of Academic Ability to respond to both the conceptual and practical needs of educators, practitioners, and policy makers as they work, together with parents, schools and communities, to enable high academic achievement for ethnic minority children.

—Beatrice L. Bridglall

the unequal distribution of resources and the perceived threat of loss of "my share" of those resources that enable cultural, gender, racial and religious bias to surface and flourish. We did not eliminate racism with the civil rights movement, but we did make enormous strides in moving this nation and other parts of the world away from the worst expressions of discrimination based on race. During the early part of the movement, when masses of ethnically diverse people saw their life chances improving and the opportunities increasing for their children to have lives better than their own, most people in this country were more willing to share those broadening opportunities. As the perception that life was getting better or that it would be better for our children began to wane, we saw increasing antagonism toward organized labor, equality for women, Blacks, Spanish-speaking persons, and others who seemed alien to whatever was passing for "standard American." It is not surprising that a book like *The Bell Curve* (Hernnstein & Murray, 1994) with its rehash of the notion about the "genetic inferiority" of some of us was published in the final decade of the last century. Nor are the tax revolts and the rescinding of affirmative action unexpected. These are the reactions of a desperate populace who have been frightened into incontinence by deindustrialization, by the exportation of production jobs, by the requirement that two or more members work in the labor force in order to support a family of four; by the downsizing of the work force while profits and the economy soar; and by realistic estimates that the next generations will not live as well as many of us do now. DuBois was right, the line between the haves and the have nots will challenge the color line as the problem of the Twenty-First Century.

To understand the magnitude of this problem it is necessary that we look more closely at what it is to have and to have not. In many of the available analyses, income distribution has been the variable of focus. For individuals, inequality in the distribution of, and inadequacy in access to, income comprise a critical factor, but for groups the problem of inequality in the distribution of wealth may be even more critical. This may be true because while income may provide limited access to available resources, it is wealth that provides access to power and control. It is also wealth that provides ready access to essential human resource development capital. Some of us are beginning to believe that without the capital to invest in human resource development it is impossible to achieve meaningful participation in an advanced technological society. What is the nature of that capital? According to Bourdieu (1986), Coleman et al. (1966), Miller (1995), Gordon and Meroe (1989), it includes:

Cultural capital: the collected knowledge, techniques and beliefs of a people.

Financial capital: income and wealth, and family, community and societal economic resources available for human resource development and education.

Health capital: physical developmental integrity, health and nutritional condition, etc.

Human capital: social competence, tacit knowledge and other education-derived abilities as personal or family assets.

Institutional capital: access to political, education and socializing institutions.

Pedagogical capital: supports for appropriate educational experiences in home, school, and community.

Personal capital: dispositions, attitudes, aspirations, efficacy, and sense of power.

Polity capital: societal membership, social concern, public commitment, and participation in the political economy.

Social capital: social networks and relationships, social norms, cultural styles, and values.

Obviously, wealth is more than money. It is the accessibility and control of resources. Schools and other social institutions seem to work when the persons served bring to them the varieties of capital that enable and support human development. If we are correct in assuming that the effectiveness of schools and other human resource development institutions is in part a function of the availability of such wealth-derived capital for investment in human development, we may have in this relationship a catalyst for pedagogical, political and social intervention.

Affirmative Action

Until recently, our society has accepted the assignment of preferential treatment to designated categories of persons as special rewards for service to the nation, as compensation for unusual prior disadvantage, or simply as the entitlement associated with one's status. These various forms of affirmative action are currently under increased attack largely because of their public and colloquial association with minority group membership privilege. In all candor, affirmative action is also under attack because of abuses in its practice. Instead of an effort to ensure that qualified persons are not disqualified because of ethnicity or gender, affirmative action is often perceived as a program to privilege "unqualified" persons over those who are "qualified." The preoccupation with race may be a part of the problem. In a racist society all social arrangements are designed to reflect racist values. And explicit efforts to subvert those values are bound to come up against open resistance.

I propose a few adjustments. Rather than targeting ethnic or gender groups for affirmative action, I propose targeting larger and more diverse groups: those that are low on wealth and wealth-derived capital resources. Education and employment opportunities could be regarded as instruments of human resource development rather than agencies for the credentialing and rewarding of the "ablest." Rather than protecting the opportunity to enter, let us ensure the opportunity to develop and qualify. In addition to a program of affirmative action, we are proposing a program of affirmative development.

The largest affirmative action effort in the history of the USA was our veterans' preference program. This was also an affirmative development program. The components of that program ensured that veterans had ample opportunities to improve their economic, education and health status. They were a protected group with respect to vocational skills development and employment. They were assisted in the acquisition of wealth through subsidized busi-

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ness and home ownership. The social ethos even gave them privileged positions in the political arena where they were enabled to access political capital through the jingoistic and patriotic biases of the populista. This national effort may have begun as a reward for service in the nation's defense establishment, but in reality it was a massive human resource development endeavor that positioned the nation's labor force for the economic and technological expansions of the latter half of the twentieth century. The affirmative development of the nation's underdeveloped human resources proved to be in the best interest of the entire United States.

An Affirmative Development Policy

A national effort at affirmative development to complement continuing efforts at affirmative action should be much broader than the initiatives directed at improving the effectiveness of education. Within the education establishment, however, we know a great deal about the deliberate development of academic ability. I propose that the education community embark upon a deliberate effort to develop academic abilities in a broad range of students who have a history of being resource deprived and who as a consequence are underrepresented in the pool of academically high achieving students. The deliberate or affirmative development of academic ability should include more equitable access to the variety of capitals referred to above and to such educational interventions as:

(1) Early, continuous and progressive exposure to rigorous pre-academic and academic teaching and learning transactions. This should begin with high levels of language, literacy, and numeracy development.

(2) Rich opportunities to learn through pedagogical practices traditionally thought to be of excellent quality. We do not need to wait for new inventions: Benjamin Bloom's Mastery Learning, Robert Slavin's Success for All, James Comer's School Development, Bob Moses' Algebra Project, Vinetta Jones' Equity 2000; the College Board's Pacesetter, and Lauren Resnick's "effort-based" "thinking curriculum" all attempt to do some of this.

(3) Diagnostic, customized, and targeted assessment, instructional and remedial interventions.

(4) Academic acceleration and content enhancement.

(5) The use of relational data systems to inform educational policy and practice decisions.

(6) Explicit socialization of intellect to multiple cultural contexts.

(7) Exposure to high performance learning communities.

(8) Explication of tacit knowledge, meta-cognition, and meta-componential strategies.

(9) Capitalization of the distributed knowledge, technique, and understanding that reside among learners.

(10) Special attention to the differential requirements of learning in different academic domains.

(11) Encouragement of learner behaviors such as deployment of effort, task engagement, time on task, and resource utilization.

(12) Special attention to the roles of attitude, disposition, confidence, and efficacy.

(13) Access to a wide range of supplementary educational experiences.

(14) The politicalization of academic learning in the lives of subaltern* communities of learners.

Intellective Competence

While my list begins with an emphasis on rigorous academic experiences and achievement, I do not stop there. The mastery of academic learning is, for me, only instrumental to the development of intellective competence. In my vision of teaching, learning and assessment, academic outcome standards are central, but the explication of what we want learners to know about specific disciplines and to be able to do must be considered as instrumental to what we want learners to become. There is no question about the importance of what students learn and are taught. Most of us would agree that teaching and learning independent of content (subject matter) is problematic. However, just as teaching and learning without subject matter are vacuous, teaching and learning should not be so constrained by content that the purpose of engagement with these pedagogical endeavors is precluded.

I am more and more persuaded that the purpose of learning, and the teaching by which it is enabled, is to acquire knowledge and technique in the service of the development of adaptive human intellect. I see these as being at the core of intellective competence. The old "scholastic aptitudes" may not have been so far from the mark. In the effort to achieve some distance from the actual material covered in the nation's diverse curricula, the scholastic aptitudes were perceived as more generic capacities to handle academic tasks. Those aptitudes should be thought of as generalized developed abilities that not only reflect the capacity to handle academic work, but more importantly, reflect the meta manifestations of intellective abilities that result from particular kinds of education and socialization. Instead of scholastic aptitudes it may be more appropriate that we think of developed intellective abilities or intellective competencies as the meta-expressions of a wide range of human learning achievements, some of which are related to what happens in schools.

These developed abilities are not so much reflected in the specific discipline-based knowledge a student may have, but in the student's ability and disposition to adaptively and efficiently use knowledge, technique, and values in mental processes to engage and solve both common and novel problems.

James Greeno suggests that what I call intellective competence is really "intellective character." What is intellective competence? I have come to use the term to refer to a characteristic way of adapting, appreciating, knowing and understanding the

phenomena of human experience. I also use the construct to reference the quality with which these mental processes are applied in one's engagement with common, novel, and specialized problems. Intellective competence reflects one's habits of mind, but it also reflects the quality or goodness of the products of mental functioning.

Like social competence, which I feel is one manifestation of intellective competence, it reflects "goodness of fit" or the effectiveness of the application of one's affective, cognitive and situative processes to solving the problems of living. Fifteen years ago I might have used the term "intelligence" or "intelligent behavior" to capture this characteristic or quality of one's mental capabilities or performance. In 2001, I am concerned with more. I am trying to capture aspects of human capability, developed ability, and disposition to use and appreciate the use of human adaptive processes in the service of intentional behavior. I am not surprised that Greeno calls it a manifestation of character. No matter what we call it, I argue that competence can be created through the deliberate development of academic ability. The task to which I am committed in my next career is the "affirmative development of academic ability" in a broader range of human beings.

Conclusion

DuBois was right! Income and wealth have replaced, or greatly reduced the significance of, the color line in our society. Ethnicity continues to be important, but economic, political, and social planning may be more appropriately directed at reducing the growing disparities between the haves and the have nots. In the Twenty-First Century, this will require a quantum leap in the development and utilization of all our peoples. It will require the affirmative development of large numbers of persons who, because of the mal-distribution of human resource development capital, have undeveloped academic and other abilities the nation will need.

Such an effort would favor the under classes in which ethnic minorities are congregated, but are by no means the majority. It would be wise, however, to remember that my proposed national program of affirmative development would privilege the development of the lower and under classes in our society. Unfortunately, classism may be an even more recalcitrant illness than racism. It is sometimes acceptable to talk of racial justice. It is generally thought to be subversive to talk about economic justice. In my judgment, however, the pursuit of universal economic justice, together with racial justice, may be the most promising route to universally optimal human development.

It may also be a necessary condition for the survival of our democratic nation. I propose to begin the pursuit of justice with the affirmative development of academic ability in those persons whose natural conditions of life do not permit the easy acquisition of intellective competence. In the Twenty-First Century, professional educators and pedagogical scientists need to fully engage the challenge posed by James Coleman in his 1965 study, Equality of Educational Opportunity (Coleman et al, 1965). Coleman challenged the nation to seek deliberately to uncouple academic achievement from the social divisions to which our students are assigned (class, ethnicity, gender, and first language). A national commitment to the affirmative development of academic ability may enable such an achievement.

—Edmund W. Gordon
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* Subaltern peoples are groups of persons who have been subordinated by the dominant culture yet have simultaneously adopted aspects, developed alternative forms and strategies of resistance to the dominant culture. Some groups of African-American males are sometimes referred to as subaltern groups.

Pedagogical Inquiry and Praxis is a publication of the Program of Research on the Affirmative Development of Academic Ability, which is sponsored by the Institute for Urban and Minority Education at Teachers College, Columbia University and the Minority High Achievement Program at the College Board. Through this publication, these institutions will provide information that has been digested and reflected upon. *Pedagogical Inquiry and Praxis* is designed to meet the needs of practitioners, policy makers, scholars of practice, and research scientists as they produce and utilize knowledge and techniques to improve the quality of academic achievement in diverse learners. It emphasizes the bi-directionality of knowledge production through practice and research, and issues associated with increasing the number of high academic achieving students who come from African American, Latina/o, and Native American families.

Published by the Institute for Urban and Minority Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, Box 75, 525 West 120th Street, New York, NY 10027, 212/678-3780. Editors: Edmund W. Gordon and Beatrice L. Bridglall. Email: Bridglall@exchange.tc.columbia.edu Web site: iume.tc.columbia.edu

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